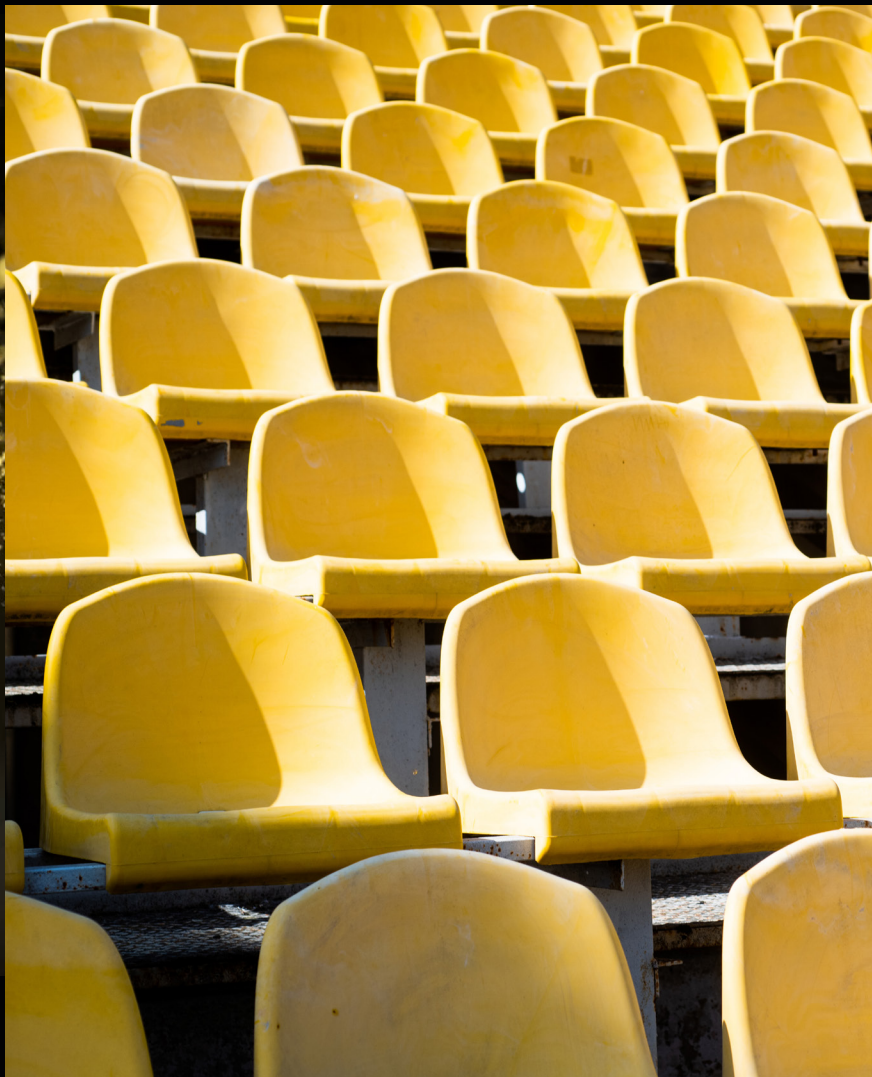


The critical role of the creative brief in producing great ideas



‘icp’

What most briefs perpetuate

“The world today is all about
karaoke,
doing a bad impression of
someone else’s great original.”

Malcolm McClaren – inventor of The Sex Pistols



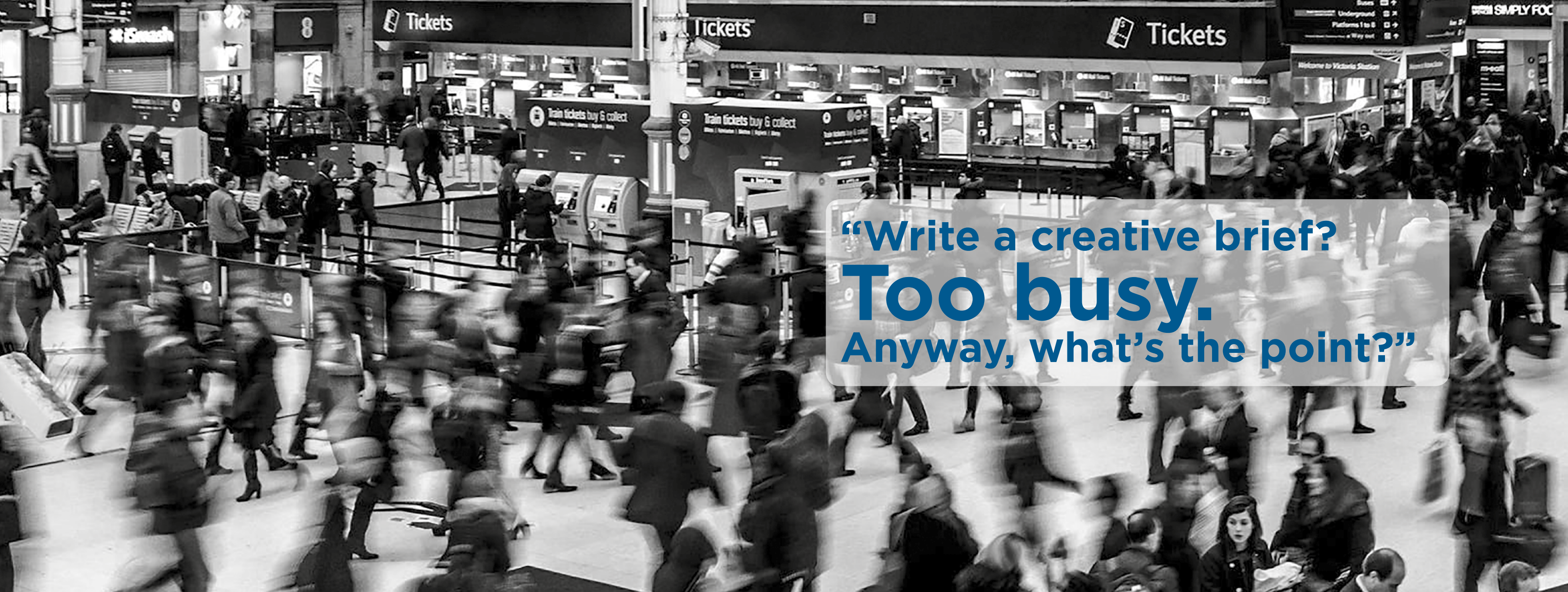
What follows is a clear and concise guide that is designed to help readers produce effective creative briefs. It also presents the ‘ICP’ philosophy and describes best practices required to produce and manage marketing communication assets.

It is aimed not only at marketing people, but also those working within internal and external agencies. Put simply, it is designed to assist all interested parties in the preparation of briefs that will lead to the development of commercially effective and engaging ideas. It also deals with the management and complexity of the executorial development that results.

The content’s credibility is born out of the authors’ experience with a cross section of large and successful brands throughout the world.

CONTENTS

- 4 The importance of the creative brief
- 6 The skills required to write a great creative brief
- 8 The creative brief’s target audience
- 10 A great brief connects with its target audience
- 12 The logic of a great creative brief
- 14 Thinking about constraints
- 16 Your target audience seldom thinks about your brand
- 18 Get who to do what?
- 20 Just a consumer? Or a spirited individual?
- 24 A lesson from the Police
- 26 The single-minded proposition
- 28 Digging deeper to find riches
- 30 Support for the single-minded proposition
- 32 Getting the creative brief “signed off”
- 32 Briefing creatives
- 34 The creative brief can help you to judge communication ideas
- 36 “We’re losing the ability to control anything that’s even remotely complex”
- 38 How creative operations manage chaos
- 40 Rights Management – saving money, time and stress
- 41 Translation & Transcreation
- 42 Eliminating stereotypes
- 44 Managing creatives
- 46 Giving creatives time and space
- 47 A word about the authors



The importance of the creative brief

Predictably, it's difficult to solve a problem or take advantage of an opportunity when you don't really know what the problem or opportunity is. A great creative brief enables either to be defined, hopefully with clarity. Further interrogation within the brief allows expectations and objectives to be clearly articulated.

If nothing else, a creative brief puts everyone on the same page – even if only, in the first draft, to provoke debate and interest.

However, a great creative brief delivers much more than an articulation of overall ambitions. It also provides real

insight into the consumer or customer that the brand or service is seeking to influence – and clearly defines the way in which the brand or service will fit into their lives in a positive way.

The time-pressured executive

A well-written stimulating creative brief will ultimately shorten the time it takes to complete a project. Why? Because it's a tool that facilitates a clear, well-articulated direction at the beginning of the marketing communications process, heading off the inevitable revisions and course corrections that are the

by-product of poor planning. In trying to save time upfront by cutting corners with the creative brief, you will live to regret the time it takes to fix things later on in the communications process.

A world of accountability

Marketing teams today exist in an age of ceaseless accountability. Every bit of executional content produced today can be tracked – whether through a code, followed via analytics or measured and monitored by means of views and downloads. Like never before, marketing communications must demonstrate their contribution

in achieving business, marketing and communication objectives. The creative brief that clearly articulates these objectives serves as an anchor with which to measure success or otherwise, allowing course correction before it is too late.

Ideas that blow you away

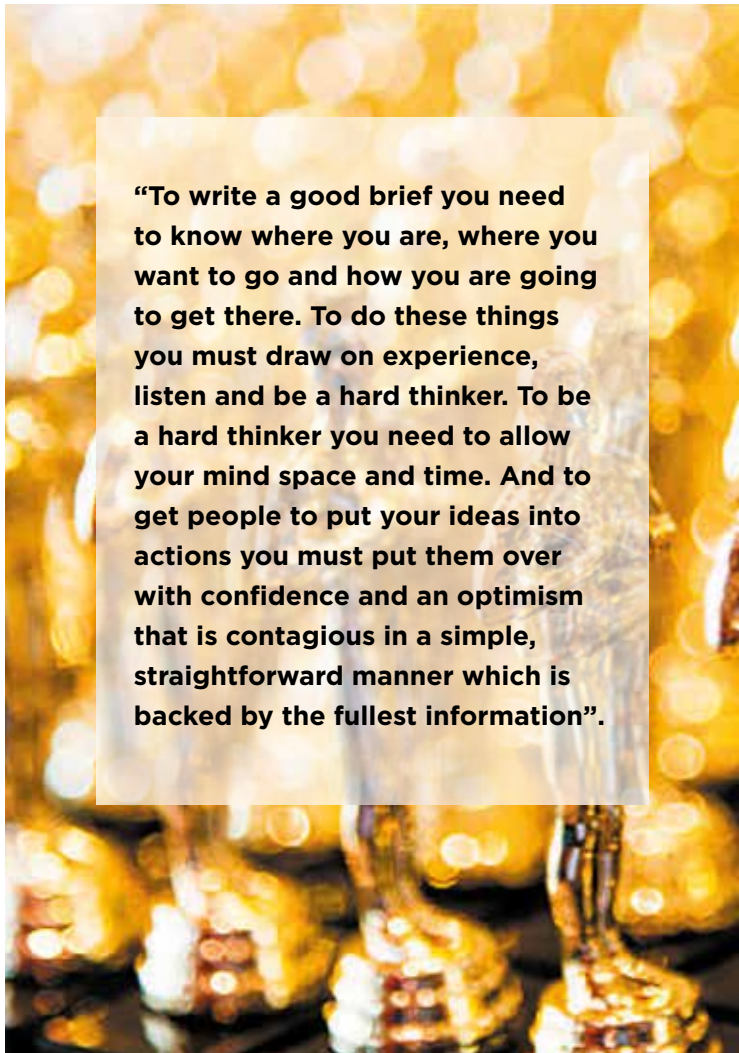
Great communication ideas are gold dust. Arguably the most important role of the creative brief is to act as a springboard for great ideas. The logic of the creative brief and the story that it tells provides the opportunity to grab the attention and inspire creative talent in whichever discipline is appropriate.

If creative work is deemed to be a failure, the chances are that the creative brief's content was insufficient, inept or even nonexistent.

The skills required to write a great creative brief

Much has been written about the skill sets required to write a great creative brief. The following examples distill key attributes of those who possess the ability to write great briefs. They are deliberately taken from outside the world of marketing communications, the world that most of us inhabit. Contextually, this is highly relevant as good briefs and briefings are central to the success or otherwise of companies, services and institutions of all types.

This example is from the world of movies – an opinion on brief writing from an Oscar winning producer. She writes:



“To write a good brief you need to know where you are, where you want to go and how you are going to get there. To do these things you must draw on experience, listen and be a hard thinker. To be a hard thinker you need to allow your mind space and time. And to get people to put your ideas into actions you must put them over with confidence and an optimism that is contagious in a simple, straightforward manner which is backed by the fullest information”.

It's worth breaking down and considering what she says:

“To write a good brief you need to know where you are, where you want to go and how you are going to get there”.

Re-framed in the language of marketing this makes perfect sense. What's the reality of where the brand or service is now, where do we want it to be and what do we say about it to whom to get to where we want to go?

“To do these things you must draw on experience, listen and be a hard thinker. To be a hard thinker you need to allow your mind space and time”.

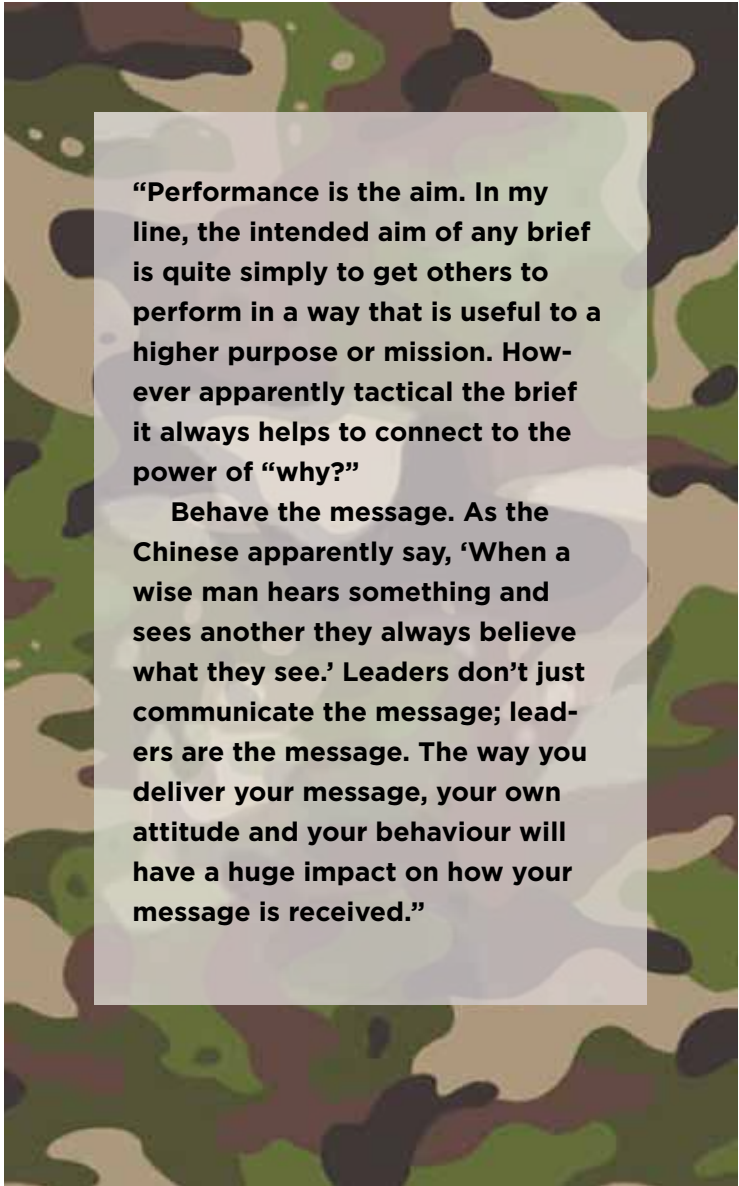
A quote attributed to Carl Gustav Jung, the founder of analytical psychology – “Thinking is difficult, that's why most people judge”. The idea of being a hard thinker often seems to conflict with the apparent reality of never having enough time. The trouble is that hard thinking often takes you beneath the surface of the obvious, the mundane and the ordinary into richer seams of the unexpected, the surprising and the extraordinary.

Also, as has already been mentioned, giving yourself time and space to write a great brief usually saves time as the marketing communications process develops.

“And to get people to put your ideas into actions you must put them over with confidence and an optimism that is contagious in a simple, straightforward manner which is backed by the fullest information”.

Great briefs are hotly contested in creative departments. So being able to articulate briefs with confidence and optimism mean you can take your pick of the best talent available to you.

The authors of great briefs are usually very good at defending the brief when interrogated because the brief is a synthesis of the fullest information that they've sourced and considered as part of its compilation.



“Performance is the aim. In my line, the intended aim of any brief is quite simply to get others to perform in a way that is useful to a higher purpose or mission. However apparently tactical the brief it always helps to connect to the power of “why?”

Behave the message. As the Chinese apparently say, ‘When a wise man hears something and sees another they always believe what they see.’ Leaders don’t just communicate the message; leaders are the message. The way you deliver your message, your own attitude and your behaviour will have a huge impact on how your message is received.”

Another tangential example comes from a commander in the US Navy Seals.

Two points emerge from this viewpoint. Firstly, a great brief provides a sense of why its outcome is important to the brand, service and company's future success. Articulating this will encourage the recipients to exceed expectations.

Secondly, a point about the physical briefing; creative talent is by nature very demanding of those being briefed. Whilst they are listening to the content of the brief they are also assessing the author of the brief. Their attitude and behaviour will have a huge impact on how the brief is received. One obvious point that emerges is the habit of sending the brief by email or even texting it. Imagine briefing soldiers about to go into battle by email.

What does the creative director think?

Winston Churchill demanded that all documents he was required to read should be no longer than one side of a sheet of paper. Likewise, a brief. But to distill a brief down this much requires a lot of time and lots of work.

I am reminded of the famous line from Blaise Pascal: ‘I’m sorry this is a long letter; I didn’t have time to write a short one’. The brief should be backed by the fullest amount of information. So attach appendices, by all means. But make sure that the brief that precedes them is as concise as possible.

The creative brief's target audience



One of the key attributes of a great creative brief reveals how well the consumer or customer is understood. And yet, given that the actual target audience for the creative brief is the creative talent that will respond to it, it's strange how often the language of the creative brief only pays lip service to the personality of the creatives who will have to respond to it. Too often it is written in a way that presumes the recipient is someone working within the confines of the marketing department. This often means writing the creative brief in a manner that will seek the line of least resistance. A creative brief written to appease internal approval procedures as opposed to providing inspiration will not produce great ideas.

A bad brief gets second rate creative talent working on it

The second reason involves understanding how agencies work. Imagine being a fly on the wall in a creative director's office on a Monday morning. He or she is sifting through the new client briefs. Each will be allocated to a specific creative team. The creative director is aware that the best talent can and will demand the best creative briefs to work on. Accordingly, the inspiring creative briefs go to the best creative talent. So if your brief fails to inspire, it gets relegated to a lesser team. As a consequence, it's less likely that you'll get great work. Experience says that the "muscle" of the client name has little impact in overriding a poor client brief.

An infamous Coca-Cola CMO once said, "I judge every creative brief on whether or not it will command the creative's shower time"; a point well made and worth bearing in mind when writing the creative brief.

"I judge every creative brief on whether or not it will command the creative's shower time"

The importance of writing a creative brief in a language that will motivate and inspire creative talent should not be underestimated. Here are two important reasons why:

Creatives often look at things through a different lens

The first is based on emotional differences. On the whole, creative talent tends to respond to stimulus in a less didactic way than marketing people. Generalities tend to bore them whilst specific relevant insight tends to intrigue them.

Hence, for instance, a creative brief written like a short story may well have more impact than one written as a marketing document.

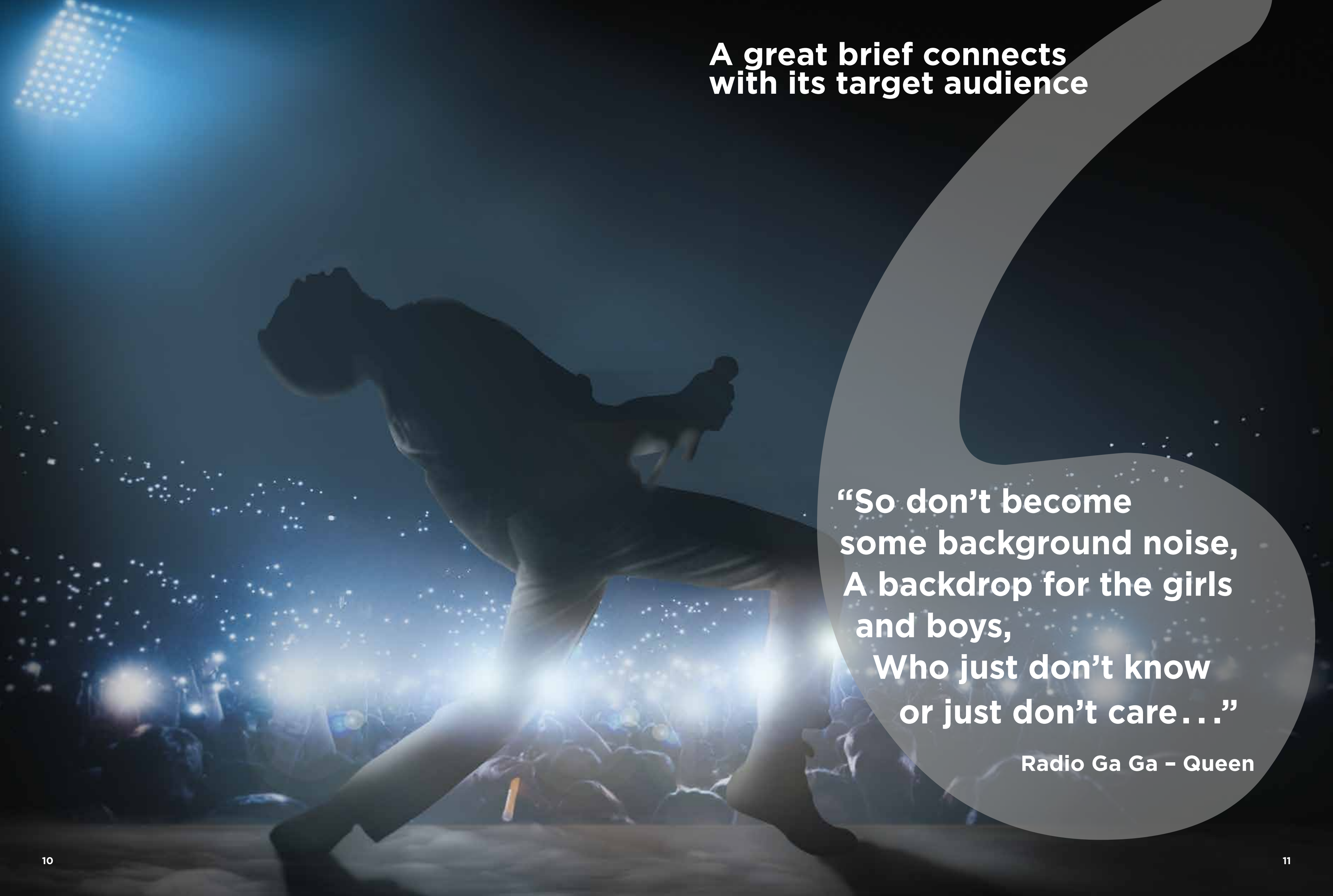


Making Carpets Magical

Here's an example from a recent brief from a manufacturer of carpets. It outlines the opportunity as seen by the CEO. He could have written, "Our objective is to increase sales of our carpets by 50% in the next two years". Instead he wrote, **"Currently, we produce enough carpet every year that, if laid end to end, would stretch from London to Dubai. Your job (agency) is to help us create demand for enough carpet in the next two years to stretch from London to Sydney"**.

The first articulation, whilst logical, hardly inspires. The second articulation immediately provokes interest and creative stimulation. Both options are actually saying the same thing – but the second option is written to engage and inspire the creative talent responding to the brief.

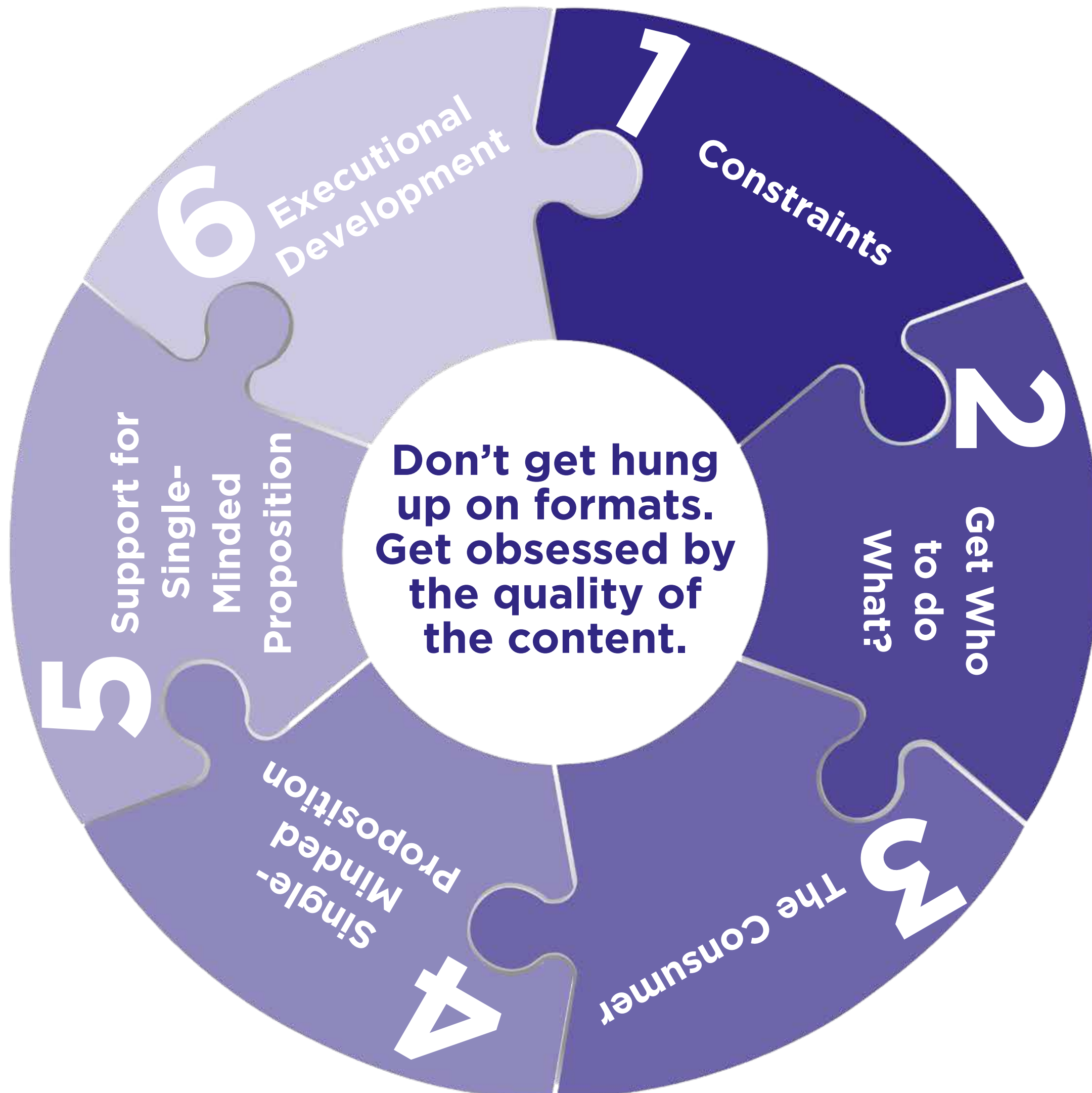


A silhouette of a person in a dynamic pose, possibly a dancer or athlete, against a night sky filled with stars and a bright light source in the upper left. The person is in a crouched, forward-leaning position with one leg extended. The background is a dark blue sky with numerous white stars and a bright, glowing light source in the upper left corner. A large, semi-transparent grey shape, resembling a stylized 'C' or a speech bubble, is positioned on the right side of the image, containing text.

**A great brief connects
with its target audience**

**“So don’t become
some background noise,
A backdrop for the girls
and boys,
Who just don’t know
or just don’t care...”**

Radio Ga Ga – Queen



The logic of a great creative brief

Creative briefs can be created and presented in many different formats. Whatever the chosen format, the best ones have absolute clarity about the objectives of the brief, demonstrate a deep consumer understanding and are incisive in respect of how the brand or service can fit into the consumer's life in a positive way. Furthermore, any assertion about the brand or service is supported with strong rational and emotional evidence.

Another element is important – the reality of constraints. These may include budget, channel planning priorities, cultural realities and timescales. The key thing is to highlight these as they will affect how creatives will respond to the brief.

1. Constraints

A summary of constraints for the brand or service – budget, timing, channel planning, geographies, cultures, etc.

2. Get Who to do What?

Who are we talking to and what behaviours and attitudes are we trying to change?

3. The Consumer

Go beyond demographics and labelling. Identify insights and describe the consumer life space that the brand or service could occupy.

4. Single-Minded Proposition

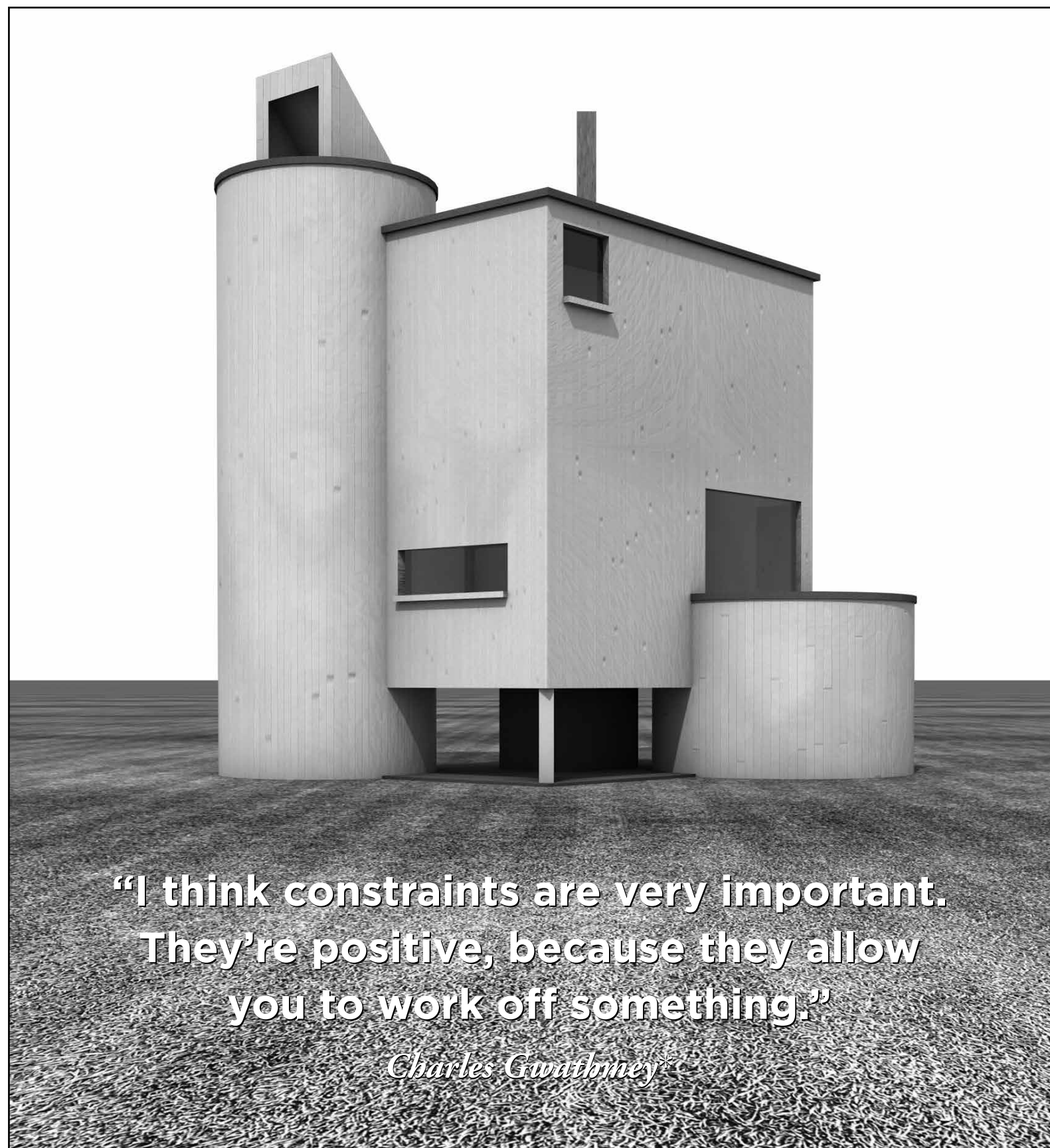
What is the most relevant thing to say about the brand or service that's appropriate to the consumer?

5. Support for Single-Minded Proposition

What is the rational and emotional support for the single-minded proposition?

6. Executional Development

Rights Management. Translation and Transcreation. Eliminating stereotypes. Managing the creative talent pool, etc.



*Charles Gwathmey was an American architect and one of The New York Five who put their own aesthetic stamp on the high modernism style developed by Le Corbusier amongst others. His passion for geometrical complexity created compelling properties and public buildings not least his controversial 1992 addition to the Guggenheim Museum in Manhattan.

Thinking about constraints

Budgets (media and production). The budget may be big or small. In either case it’s important to know what size the budget is. It’s a mistake to presume that the smaller the budget the less likely it is to generate a big idea with brilliant executional development.

As a case in point, entrepreneurial startups often have little money to spend on advertising. So they have to make choices. This often means concentrating on the medium which is most important to them – the one where they may have the only chance to influence the consumer. In some cases this may be packaging. In others it may be social media. The important thing is that the reality of the constraint is recognized with the creative brief.

Channel planning priorities. As we will see well-articulated objectives can help define priority channels. Whilst a big idea should arguably work in any channel, focusing the creatives into the key channel or channels is important. If this happens to be TV all well and good. But TV may not be a priority.

For instance, it may be that creating a strong in-store presence is equally, if not more important. So, in this case, the creatives need to know upfront that the idea and subsequent executions will primarily be judged on their potential effectiveness in-store.

Cultural realities. Nowadays marketing communication runs beyond the geographical boundaries from where it was originated. This has implications for creative development. Most obviously any work must be understood

both literally and appreciated emotionally across wide ranging geographies and cultures. For instance, an idea and executions for a beauty brand may have to gain traction in, say, France and Brazil simultaneously. In reality each of these cultures view beauty in a very different way. Whilst this may (or may not) impose constraints on the subtlety of the idea and subsequent executional development, the brief needs to recognize the reality of such cultural distinctions and potential constraints.

Timescales. Lack of time is the harsh reality of marketing communications. In the context of the creative brief, it’s already been mentioned that a great creative brief will invariably save time later on in the marketing communications development process.

A great creative brief’s influence is less likely to lead to the spiral of creative revisions that can dog the creative process and lead to a loss of purpose and morale within a creative team.

What does the creative director think?

“Every brief comes with a set of constraints: money constraints, time constraints, cultural constraints and the inherent constraints of the product or service that is to be featured. As a creative person, you cannot venture outside these constraints, but you are free to do anything that is relevant, entertaining, amusing, unusual, original or informative within them”.



Your target audience seldom thinks about your brand

A word of caution! Understandably, most marketing people spend much of their time thinking about how their brand's various attributes will appeal to a defined target audience. Often they frame this in the context of the category that they operate in. How are we better and more appealing than our immediate competitors? This can lead to a myopic expression of how we want the consumer to think and feel. Here is an actual example written by a brand manager working in household cleaning. For the desired think and feel:

"Wow! Now Brand X has more perfume than any other household cleaner. From now on my kitchen will smell even better than ever".

The notion that people wake up in the morning and think immediately about how their kitchen could smell better is, of course, absurd. So, in a reality where most brands are now indistinguishable in respect of their physical attributes, brands need to look beyond product acclamations or category superiority claims. How the brand can fit into the wider context of the consumer's life in a positive way becomes more and more important. "The desired think and feel" is where this wider context needs to be defined. What space do we want to occupy in our consumer's life?

EGGS
ANDREX
WASABI
PAMPER'S
SIRSMITH
CHEMIST
PADRON'S
GIRLS LUNCH!
HAVE A
NICE DAY
PARENTS
VISIT
YOUR'S



Get who to do what? Setting objectives

Middle-class Indian
parents are obsessive
about the quality of
their children's education



Objectives set out the ambitions of the brief and ideally confirm the marketing (behaviour) and communication (think and feel) objectives. Here is a format that can help define objectives based on “Get who to do what?”

The relationship between behaviour and attitudes.

The first thing to fill in is the current consumer behaviour. This summarises the current purchasing behaviour of the consumer. Behaviour is defined as penetration, frequency of purchase or consumption.

Next is how we would wish consumer behaviour to change – do we want more consumers to buy or switch to the brand, consumers to use the brand more frequently or consumers to trade up to larger pack sizes or whatever? It may be a combination.

Then is how the consumer currently thinks and feels about the brand or service. Usually, but not exclusively, this is defined from quantitative research or other such data.

The key element is how we want the consumer to think and feel as a result of interacting with the marketing communications. This may well be born out of consumer insight and links to the depth of consumer understanding.

This example is from the assurance market in India. It's outlining the “Get who to do what?” for an assurance plan to sell more Child Education Plans to the burgeoning middle classes in Indian cities. Within the middle classes, Indian parents have an obsession with educating their children to the highest possible standard. Consequently, within this group, Indian children are some of the best educated in the world.

The “Desired think and feel” plays off not falling into the trap of delaying to commit to a Child Saving Plan. Instinctively, most people put off decisions about things that still seem to be quite a distance away – even Indian parents with young children not yet in primary education probably view such a plan as a relatively low priority.

Clearly defining the “Get who to do what?” also helps to define other parameters:

Budget. If you know exactly what you are trying to do it's easier to define the budget necessary to achieve the desired behaviour change.

Channel selection. Assessing which channels are priorities to achieve the task in hand is again easier when you have clarity about the objectives

Metrics. Once the “Desired think and feel” is written it may suggest that additional metrics need to be put in place or emphasized in brand tracking studies, online surveys, etc.

Get who to do what?

Current Behaviour

Desired Behaviour

Current Think & Feel

Desired Think & Feel

Insight that unlocks the change

Persuade city-based Indian parents to purchase a Child Saving Plan

Current Behaviour

The current penetration of the Child Plan is 1% (250,000 plans), or one per 1,000 parents of children living in cities

Desired Behaviour

To increase the penetration of the Child Plan to 2% (500,000 plans), or one per 500 parents of children living in cities

Current Think & Feel

Parents living in Indian cities with young children tend to put off saving for their children's education even though they know it will determine their future success or otherwise

Desired Think & Feel

By committing to a Child Saving Plan now I am already helping to ensure that my child has the best possible opportunity to succeed in life

Insight: The choices you make right now define you and your child's future

“Excite me!”

Demographic
“BC1C2 aged
18-25”

Just a consumer? Or a spirited individual?

The very word consumer is dehumanising – who ever talked about their family, friends or work colleagues as consumers? If we begin to think of them as real people who live real lives it may help to refocus the way that we talk about them in a creative brief and help gain valuable insight.

In many creative briefs, when they talk about the consumer, the author tries to package them up with language that, whilst maybe well intentioned, provides little insight into them as real people.

The inspiration of Soho, London

Let’s give this viewpoint some substance by way of an example. It’s taken from the world of travel. As a neighbourhood, Soho was trying to attract young adults to spend time and money in the area.

In the first instance the brief defined the target audience using demographics.

There was much debate about the age range. After all, eighteen-year-olds are very different from twenty-five-year-olds – the latter are more experienced, as they are working and earning money.

The creative reaction to this debate was “so what”. They felt no creative traction with either the demographic definition or the age debate.

The next option was to re-frame the target audience with a headline descriptor. They were part of Generation Z.

Within the revised brief, Generation Z was defined by certain characteristics.

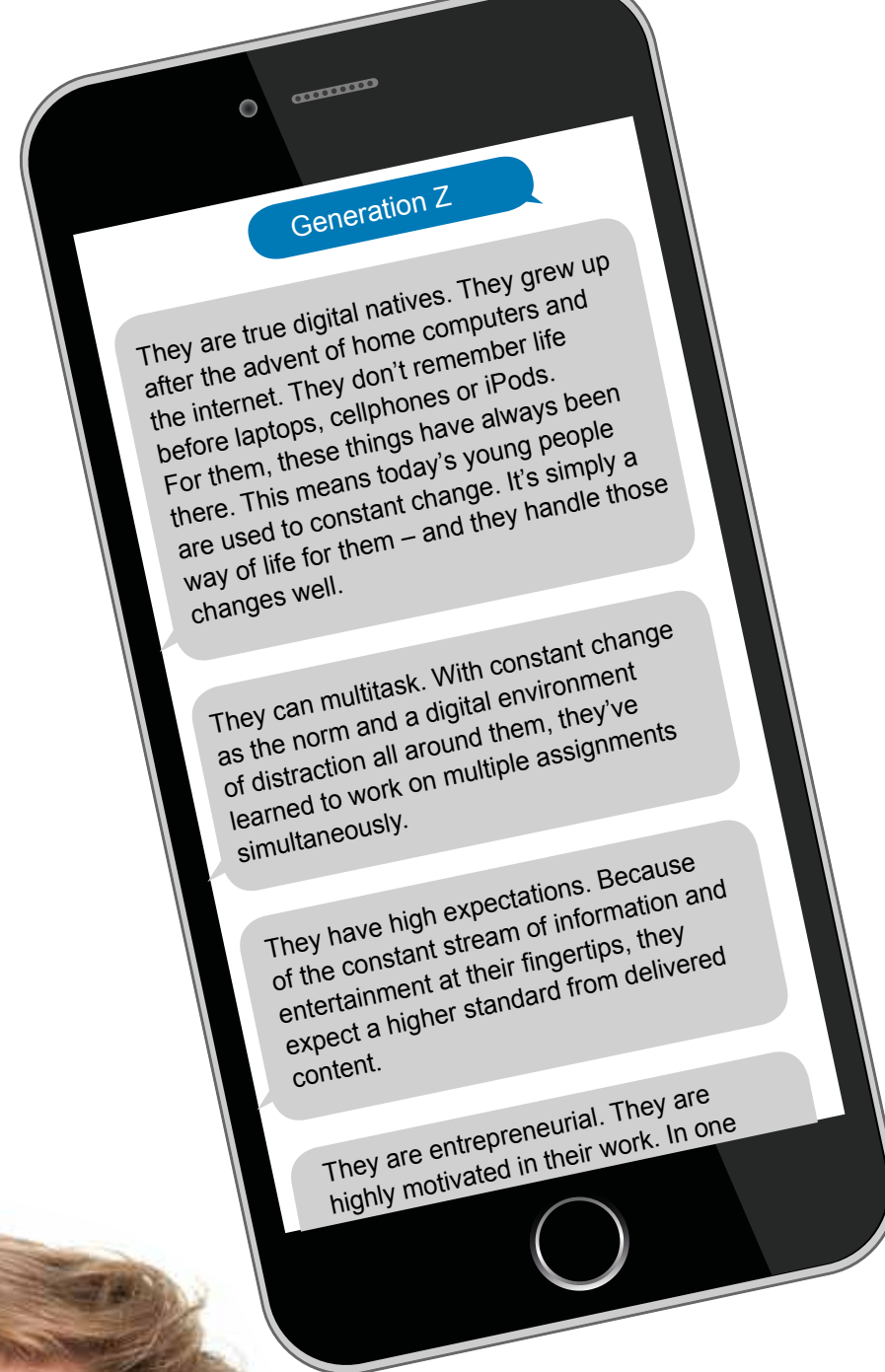
This created more interest as it began to give a sense of what this audience were like and what their motivations were. But the challenge remained. Why would they want to visit Soho? Someone asked the authors of the brief if they had spent time observing and talking to people in this age group – those who currently frequented Soho? The non-affirmative answer led to several days of “foraging” in Soho with the express purpose of getting under the skin of the consumer.

As a result, a pen portrait was written with the intention of bringing the consumer to life in a way that would inspire the creatives. It synthesized the excitement that Soho could create amongst this group.

From a creative perspective, the pen portrait got under the skin of the target audience, providing a rich source of insights that acted as a springboard for potential creative ideas.

**“You’re a
Generation Z
digital native”**

“If you say so”



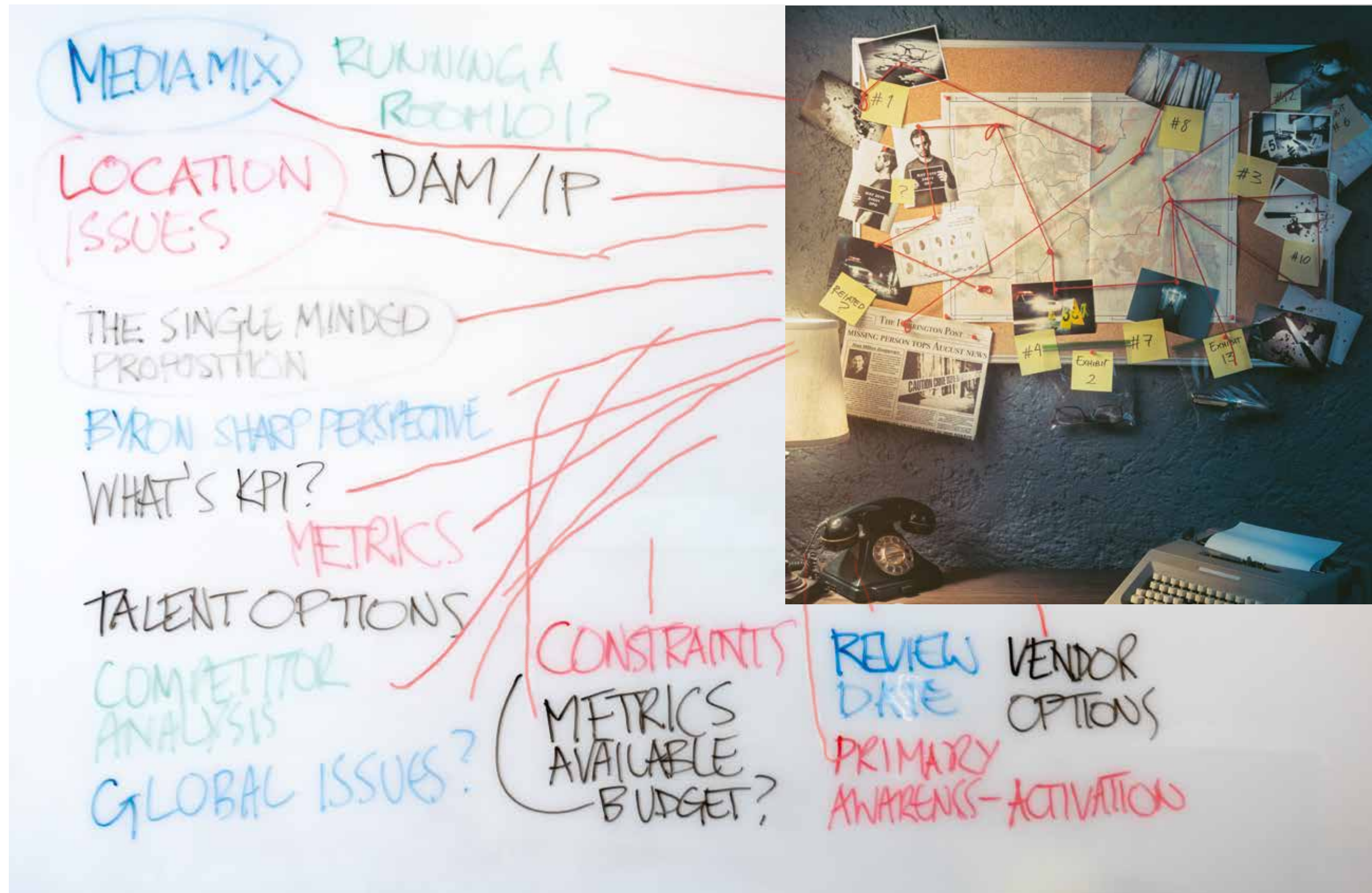
Introducing touch and feel through a pen portrait

Twenty-one-year-old Barney has moved away from parental control and now has sufficient income and experience to confidently explore the endless possibilities that can come together to define his own authentic identity.

To this end he is constantly curious. Like a jigsaw he is piecing together new friendships, relationships, work options, where, when and how he socialises, his politics, the holiday he goes on, what and where he eats and drinks, the music he's into, what he wears and how he looks (clothes and hair). Everything is on his agenda.

His high energy “search engine” helps him to explore – from the obvious (safe) to the more (perceived) radical options. Social media, in particular, allows him to explore relentlessly. He's always looking for clues.

For him Soho London is the pinnacle of “what if?” It pushes his boundaries. It flirts with his dreams. He may or may not have been there – it doesn't matter. Either way, for him, it's a maelstrom of energy, excitement and endless possibilities. You “walk in” with breathless expectations. You “walk out” with mounting excitement. It's a catalyst to help define the authentic you. It's not quite what you thought – it's far more exciting. People in the street, overheard conversations and mannerisms, shops, looks and styles provide the confirmation. You've found it – Soho's unique style. You've found you. You can become part of its look and feel. If not literally, then by proxy.



A lesson from the police

One way to help immerse yourself in the consumer's life is to take a lead from the police.

The way in which they solve serious crimes is firstly to create an incident room. Detectives gather evidence from multifarious sources. The way in which they gather the evidence is meticulous – interviews are recorded verbatim, pictures taken from every angle and so on. As the evidence builds they create a physical incident room where all the evidence is stuck up on a wall or equivalent. When they meet to review progress they meet in the incident room. They look for what they might be missing. Clues to solving the crime often emerge from making connections with different pieces of evidence. Contrary to the portrayal of an angst-ridden detective suddenly having a lightbulb moment, in reality it's a painstaking forensic process of piecing together the jigsaw.

Creating an incident room to gather evidence about a brand's consumer is an exciting way to constantly keep track of their relationship with the brand, category and beyond. Also, you should look for people who influence the consumer's day-to-day life. For instance, in the hair category talk to hairdressers – they spend an inordinate amount of time listening to clients' concerns about not only hairstyles but also health, beauty and beyond.



The single-minded proposition

The single-minded proposition places the product, brand or service in a way that, through the resulting executions, suggests a compelling reason for the consumer to buy the product, brand or to use the service. Again, the best single-minded propositions reflect a depth of understanding of the intended target audience. They usually answer the question, “how, when and where is the product, brand or service most appropriate in the target audience’s life?”

Historically, physical product benefits were enough to entice the consumer and differentiate the brand product or service within its category. In most markets it’s now difficult to claim superiority through physical product benefits. Equality of product performance is usually a given in most categories (not all). This means that brands now need to occupy and own an emotional space in the lives of their consumers.

The cut-throat world of detergent marketing

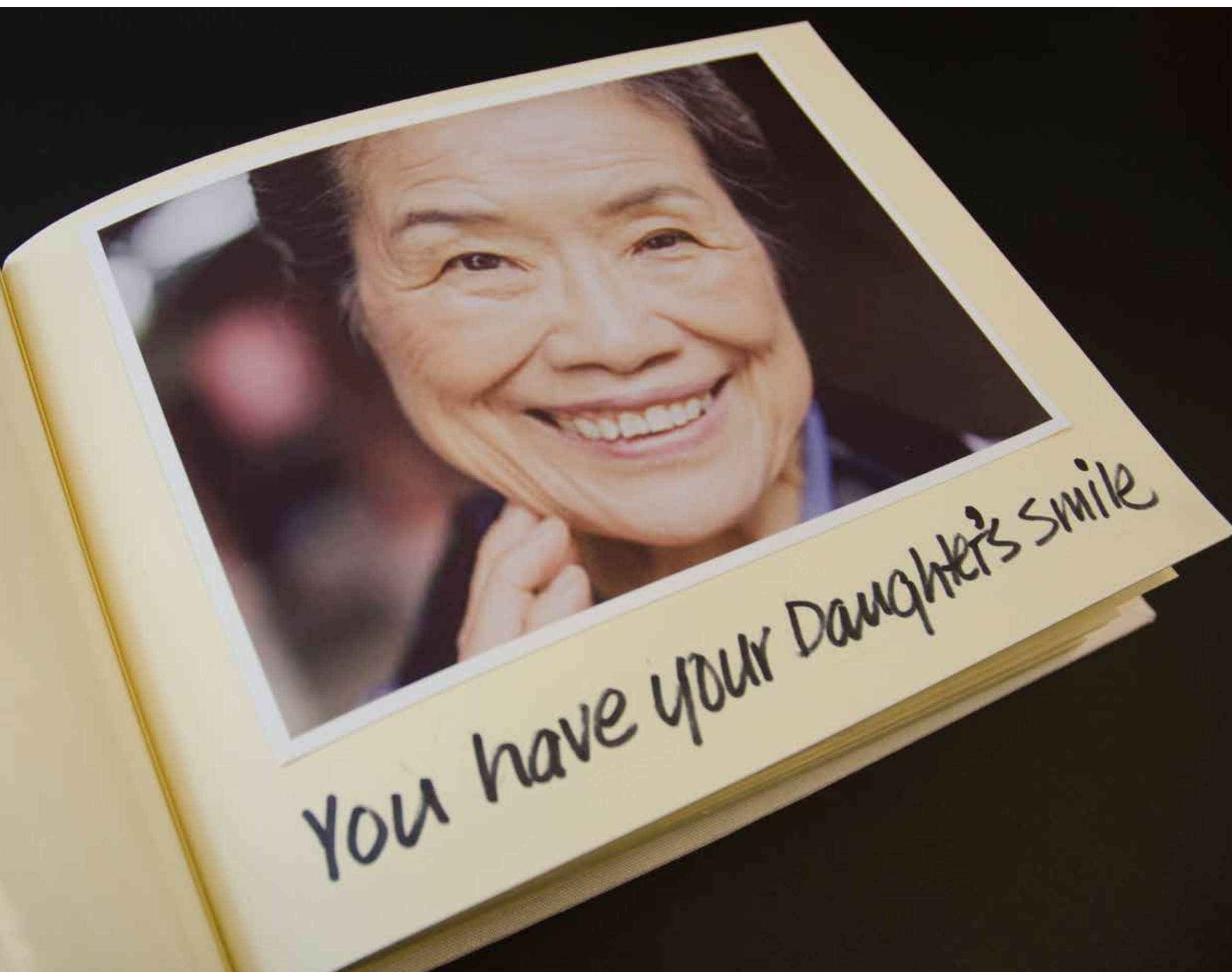
The following example provides strong evidence of the migration over time from a product based single-minded proposition to one based on an emotional consumer benefit. It’s taken from the detergents market. The brand is known as Persil in the UK.

The historical product single-minded proposition was: “Persil’s new formula means even whiter whites”. This was a claim derived from a world where the cleanliness of a man’s shirt defined one’s worth as a wife. This is a rather ludicrous premise nowadays (though not in all cultures) but historically, highly relevant and sustainable.

A category single-minded proposition followed, “Persil keeps shirts fresher than any other detergent”. This became non-sustainable in the reality of the ubiquity of

detergent product performance. Consumers recognise that nearly all detergents are much of a muchness.

Inspiration was found when investigating the wider world of the consumer. This led to the thought that, *“Letting kids get dirty is good. It’s a positive part of any child’s development”*. An emotionally based single-minded proposition derived from a deep understanding of a parent’s relationship with their kids as they grow up. This became the springboard for, *“Dirt is Good”* - a thought that, in many markets, redefined the relationship consumers had with detergents.



Digging deeper to find riches

A previous section suggested that being in constant touch with the target audience can throw up potential areas of interest to a brand or service.

For a number of years, the beauty brand Dove has run campaigns that fly in the face of hitherto accepted insights into beauty – usually involving rigorous regimes to maintain a youthful figure and skin quality; inevitably an uphill struggle as you get older.

Dove's campaign based on "beauty without artifice" suggested that physical shape and size are less important than the celebration of the real beauty of who you are as a person.

In Japan, investigating elder women threw up an intriguing single-minded proposition that came directly from a verbatim quote in a qualitative research group, "You have your daughter's smile". The potential of such a thought triggered an immediate positive creative response. To the intended older audience, it implied that you are still like your daughter – in a way that transcends age.

The best single-minded propositions act as a springboard for creative ideas and subsequent executions. They are derived from an in-depth understanding of the product, brand, service, category and target audience. It requires hard work.

Support for the single-minded proposition

When presented with a single-minded proposition creative teams often ask what evidence supports the proposition – either rational, emotional or both. This makes absolute sense. When you make an assertion as part of a reasoned argument, you fall back on the evidence to support your argument when interrogated. Good creative briefs provide the evidence to support the assertion inherent in the single-minded proposition. Creatives often tend to write executions from the support for the single-minded proposition. They will often ask the question when presented with the single-minded proposition:

“Why should I believe that?”

What does the creative director think?

“Telling a story can be an inspiring aid to the brief. A creative team was being briefed to write a commercial for Land Rover. The person who was briefing then told them a story about an Australian farmer. The farmer had harnessed the Land Rover’s winch to a tree, which he wished to fell. Then he went to lunch. When he returned he found the Land Rover had climbed the tree. This story fired the team’s imagination. If it can climb a tree, what else could it climb? They chose to show it climbing the face of a dam”.



RIVER BANK

028731_2103 1 / 0 20870 9982 220 299

BIG BUSINESS CORPORATION
108A CAROLINE STREET
LONDON
W2X 8XJ

TO 30APR 2019
UK COMMERCIAL

Branch:
UK COMMERCIAL

International Bank Account Number:
IBAN: GB908 MUK 21099 89010 89021 1

Branch Identifier Code
BIC: RIVGB9X

Page No.
1

Account Number
879010290

Sheet No.
15

Type of Account:
Current

Value Date	Details	Withdrawal	Deposits	Balance
------------	---------	------------	----------	---------

The World of Banks

Banks can be notoriously fickle in their marketing communication – vague promises being made with little tangible evidence of how such promises will be kept. River Bank is an exception. This is probably because the Bank was created with the customer always at the forefront in terms of what they required from a proper banking service. **River Bank’s single-minded proposition** was, “We deliberately design our banks to complement the reality of customers’ everyday needs”. This begs the question, “What are their everyday needs?” **River Bank** defined these from asking customers. Hence:

- Open 8am to 8pm every day including weekends
- Staff there during customer lunch breaks
- Able to open an account immediately
- Cards and cheque book issued immediately
- Even dog water bowls and baby changing facilities.



A famous swimwear company briefed the creative team under water

Getting the creative brief “signed off”

A creative brief is a landmark in the communication process. Its author or authors have defined the direction that the brand or service should take in the defined target audience. It will be an important document to help judge creative output.

In this context it's important that key stakeholders approve the brief before using it to discuss with creatives. As well as the author, other signatories should include the team leader (marketing director or equivalent), the agency creative director and planning director.

It may be that the experience of the key stakeholders, when reviewing the creative brief, will suggest changes that lead to a stronger brief. This is good as, at best, it serves to elevate the brief from good to great – as in giving it the best possible chance to act as a catalyst for great work.

Briefing creatives

Much has been written about creating the right environment to brief creatives.

Certainly there are a few givens that should be adhered to:

Give the briefing the importance it deserves, particularly for a new project. This means giving yourself enough time to brief the team properly – not as an adjunct of another meeting just because it makes your schedule a bit easier. Remember what has been previously stated. In effect, you are “pitching” to get the best creative talent to work on your brief.

Choose the right physical environment – somewhere conducive to the content that you will be discussing. The theatrics of briefing often come to the fore at this point. As an example, a creative brief for a beer being briefed in a bar

or even a creative brief for swimming trunks being briefed underwater. If it adds real value to the briefing, great. But often the theatrics become a triumph of form over substance and get in the way of the core message the brief is attempting to deliver. What's the point of briefing for a beer brand in a noisy bar when no-one can hear anybody speaking? It happens!

Whilst it should be an occasion that inspires creatives, the creative briefing may act as a catalyst for further debate and questions. It may lead to other directions being discussed. This should be encouraged and not closed down due to hierarchies or fragile egos.

Creatives, in particular, may have a different slant on the creative brief which is worth discussing. It may well lead to a better place (or not).

It's never a bad idea to let creatives see a draft brief. Their instincts veer towards whether or not the brief is a springboard for ideas.

The medium is the message. Given the structure of many companies it may not always be possible to have face to face briefings. By necessity, a briefing may have to be undertaken via web meeting, or emailed and then discussed over the phone. Whatever the reality, think hard about the restrictions that need to be addressed in each case.

Who should be in the briefing? In all honesty the fewer the better. As soon as briefings get overcrowded, role play occurs. The senior executive who has had little input into writing the brief suddenly feels compelled to have his or her say even though they are far removed from the action. Try and keep it to team leaders, the author(s) of the creative brief and the relevant creatives. Think hard about the justification for anyone else being present.



The single-minded client proposition:
Our fish are always freshly caught

The agency's communication idea for
Your New Fish Restaurant campaign:

**Tomorrow's
fish
are still
in the sea**

The creative brief can help you to judge communication ideas

The ideal output of a great creative brief is a powerful communications idea that can generate executions in chosen channels.

The creative brief can help judgement in the following ways:

- Is the idea presented a powerful evocation of the single-minded proposition?
- Is the idea, and are the subsequent executions, relevant to the target audience as described in the brief?

- Does the idea, and are the subsequent executions, strong enough to fulfill the stated objectives?

Much has been written about the importance of gut feel when judging creative work. Inevitably, when you are first exposed to an idea and executions, there is an immediate reaction.

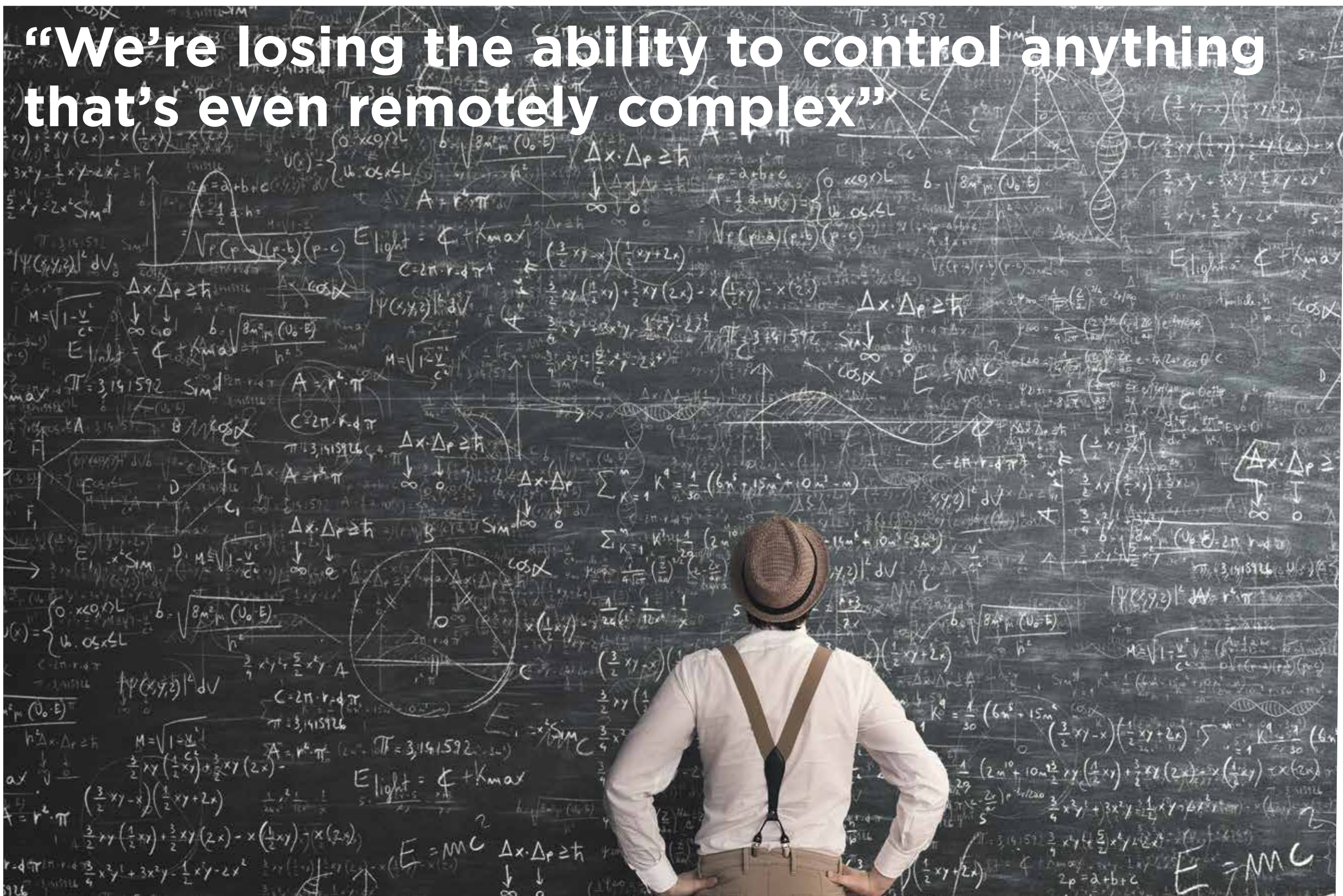
You may love the work presented, you may not be sure, or you may be underwhelmed, by what you are presented

with. This is where the creative brief can be really helpful – it can help to diagnose the feelings toward the work presented by answering the questions already mentioned.

One thing is really important. Start by judging the idea that has been presented. If the idea is off brief it's unlikely that the executions will save the day. So spending time discussing detailed points about each execution becomes a worthless exercise. Once the idea is understood

and hopefully liked, it becomes much easier to judge the executions in the context of the idea.

Giving feedback to the agency creatives. This requires a certain amount of discipline. Feedback should not be a shopping list of everyone's comments. Most importantly, avoid plunging into feedback on executional detail before expressing the overall reaction to the work and an opinion on the excitement, or otherwise, generated by the idea presented.



This quote is attributed to Chuck Klosterman, a renowned New York Times journalist and social commentator. He speculates that, whilst technological advances grow exponentially, society seems less and less capable of controlling the effect of such advances.

The same is potentially true of marketing communications. Delivering high quality executions across multiple platforms is becoming more and more complex. Creative services, in particular, are at the sharp end of dealing with such complexity.

For them, the creative brief has an important role to play in this context. Our commentary so far has concentrated on the role of the brief to ignite creatives to produce great ideas and executions. Equally important is to recognise how the creative brief should act as a checklist to ensure the delivery of quality executions. "Executorial guidelines" is often a very important element of developing creative work that is overlooked. These act as a "stop and think" sign before plunging into the expense of executorial development.



Heaven's Gate is an epic 1980s western shot in remote multiple locations across Montana with an ensemble cast of actors directed by Michael Cimino, the Oscar winning director of The Deer Hunter.

The movie's budget was originally set at a wildly optimistic \$7.5 million. It is notable for being one of the biggest box office failures of all time, losing the studio \$114 million. This epic creative operations mis-management culminated in the closure of United Artists and a re-evaluation the power of the auteur director for decades to come.

There were major setbacks in the production due to miscasting, construction and re-construction of whole sets, cost overruns, endless retakes, employing hundreds of extras never used and props never filmed.

By the end of the sixth day of shooting the director was five days behind schedule. By the end of principal photography, he had amassed 1.5 million feet of exposed film; the largest footage in cinematography history.

The film was delivered four times over budget and one year late. The original director's work print cut for executive approval reportedly ran 5 hours 25 minutes!

This epic creative operational mis-management offers a salutary lesson as its total lack of time management, resource management and financial management changed the way Hollywood operated for decades.

Steven Bach, then senior vice-president at UA wrote unguardedly about the whole debacle in his best-selling book Final Cut: Dreams and Disaster in the Making of Heaven's Gate

Creative Operations: how to avoid chaos in an increasingly complex marketing environment.

Whilst it was a salutary lesson for the movie business it highlights the critical role that operational teams play in a similar creative and challenging environment; marketing communications.

They are in the front-line overseeing talent, resource, time and financial management, as well as stakeholder engagement, MarTech and AdTech applications and the overall process from creative brief to media delivery. These people are the real Superheroes.



Rights Management – saving money, time and stress

Creative operations people need to gather information from the creative brief. Also, can they check using Digital Asset Management (DAM) and Marketing Resource Management (MRM); issues such as budget, previous examples, previous learnings and practicalities etc.

One vital use of DAM is to avoid rights management problems

The risk of violation and penalties and ensuring proper handling of local country taxes and labour laws are important attributes of DAM.

We have all probably had some experience with non-compliance and know this can become a very expensive mistake.

Ensure that you are clear on the requirement for rights and that you are covered for all your required channels. If you do not want to take out full usage, make sure that options are pre-negotiated, leaving you with far easier

negotiations should the scope change.

Other benefits of using DAM:

Efficiencies – identify any duplicate use payments for foreign markets and uncover redundancies in the negotiation process.

Transparency and customised reporting of all talent & rights across markets, media etc.

Increased efficiency and ease of rights management – tracking expiries, usage rights and re-negotiations.

Implementing change management & compliance audits, delivered by a team of rights management experts (in local market/region) to report on and measure effectiveness & compliance of standards established.

Providing a centralised business affairs service that delivers cost savings & efficiencies over current creative agency business affairs provision and fees. Providing a global rights, talent negotiation & management service.

Translation and Transcreation

Which is it? It's important to know what's required and to adapt accordingly dependent on the final output, quantity and budget for the particular marketing message format.

What are the different regions and languages, so the creative integrity is maintained, and the communication is culturally appropriate? Have your audience in mind and know the markets the brief is going to affect. Ensure the creative output is culturally relevant in your markets.

You do not want to cause offence and at times things have opposite meanings. This can also link back into research. Use your language and market experts for advice before going ahead with translation/transcreation. Identify if your client's local market personnel are available to check.

Creative operations need to police the brief – make sure everything is thought about in advance, as part of the brief. Think inside the box.





Eliminating stereotypes

Does your brief ask that “progressive” portrayals of people in the creative output are achieved by adopting an approach to eliminate stereotypes? Does it depict people in roles that are modern or forward-looking, rather than simply eliminating stereotypes? Will the process include means of ensuring how this is evaluated? Flag key considerations in the brief.

Managing the creative talent pool

The brief must define the key skills required – whether internal resources, external agencies or contractors.

Creative Operations is all about selecting the best and relevant creative resource, sometimes in agreement with any internal key stakeholders. There should be an objective business case to determine the best resources from those available or from the company's preferred vendor list.

Your company will inevitably have its own philosophy on how it buys creative. It may be in-house, freelance or from an agency.

You need to ensure your choice is the most relevant to fit your brief; the easy option; 'the same one we used last time'. There are some obvious benefits of using a resource with existing knowledge from previous projects. However, the 'upside' is countered by the problem of restricting the thinking by a pre-conceived understanding. Sometimes fresh thinking from a resource with no prior knowledge can be beneficial. Also, shift the emphasis of the required output to resource that is more relevant for example resource with experiential, social or design orientated capabilities.





靈感

Give creatives time and space

One smart move in any timing plan is to give creatives as much time as possible to respond to the brief. This invariably lessens the risk of work being presented that was, in the creative's heart, not as good as it could have been.

One anecdote to make the point: a particularly good client used to email or text the agency the day before the creative presentation. He always asked the same question, *"If I give you guys a couple more days will I get better work as a result?"* A smart way to operate. He invariably got great work because he understood how creatives work.

A word about the authors:

John Almond:

John Almond started his career in creative agencies including DDB, TBWA and JWT, where he held senior account management positions with clients like Unilever, H.J. Heinz and VW. Inspired by Simon Clift, Unilever's then CMO, he established a consultancy focused on delivering live action marketing communication workshops around the world, dedicated to honing the brief development process to inspire great creativity. From this startpoint, John's workshop concept expanded providing support to ICI, Barclays Bank and Johnson & Johnson amongst others.

His book *"Briefs, Briefing and Judgement"* is used by all Mondelez International offices worldwide as their 'playbook' for the briefing process.

Mike Everett:

Mike Everett is an accomplished writer and Creative Director. He has won many awards worldwide and sat on all the major award juries. His clients include brands in numerous categories; automotive, health and beauty, fashion, FMCG and financial services. His agency experience includes Grey's, Lowes, ABM and CDP.

He has been a consultant worldwide advising and mentoring creative departments country by country on how to interrogate and evaluate briefs. Mike is a founder and Creative Partner at Anatomised.

Yvonne Powles:

Yvonne Powles has spent her working years in production departments. Yvonne started in marketing & creative agencies such as CHI & Partners with a focus on TV. Over 13 years at ICP she's developed the TV & Digital production offerings whilst gaining a wealth of experience managing the creation, adaptation, implementation, production and distribution of international advertising and brand communications. She's worked alongside many clients including Estée Lauder, Coach, Calvin Klein, Diageo & Tiffany & Co.

What's next?

Many clients accept their briefs need to be better.

ICP can help you with dedicated interactive workshops and one-on-one coaching.

We do this for both multinational clients across numerous geographies or locally.

The payback is immediate.

- Better briefs guarantee better creative
- Better creative lasts longer and can be more effectively adapted, reused and localised
- Better creative gets you a better return on every dollar, euro or pound of your media spend

We'd love to have a conversation with you where we listen to your potential requirements and respond accordingly.



Meanwhile, take a look at our short video film and see if this sparks any insights into your own situation by sharing it around your office.

Or you can review our webinar on the same subject here.

icpnet.com/creativebrief
david.howlett@icpnet.com
+44 (0)20 7436 4300

‘icp’